

SPEED & SKILLS CHANGE THE GAME

The upgrading of fundamental skating skills after the 1972 USSR - Canada Summit Series have had a heavy impact on North American hockey. The statement **"if you can't skate, you can't play"** eventually became acknowledged by all "hockey" people.

The overall improvement of skating led to another very important aspect: emphasis on stick-puck control instead of numerous passes to playmates. The game is still played along the walls and in the corners, but what we are seeing right now is a "new game" where skilled players are being allowed to perform their skills and intimidate their opponents through great speed accompanied by a solid stick-puck control. Today a defenceman is expected to be skilled enough to confront a counterattack, fast enough to cover streaking forwards and establish sovereignty in his own zone.

In this new reality the traditional hockey game is turning into an International Sport where speedy players with creative hands-stick-puck "imagination" successfully challenge bigger players who result to playing through the use of intimidation.

Hockey is pro-gressing following the logic of evolution of all other sports. This is no more a plain "old game" which many of us, old timers, played outdoors in bitter cold with one-fourth of the equipment that is mandatory to have today. The "new game" belongs to the "mature" sport of Hockey which puts high expectations on the performance of the players: their speed, stick-puck handling, maneuverability, etc.

FUN: IS IT A RIGHT OR WRONG MESSAGE?

FUN seems to be the fundamental philosophy in the North American approach to the development of young hockey players. But there is no clear understanding where FUN should come from and therefore there is no consensus on what we have to do for a child to enjoy Hockey sport.

When a child first enters Hockey everything amuses him. Equipment, games, team, practices are new for him. He enjoys every moment of this new activity. It is interesting for him, he has FUN.

With time passing by, the child is getting used to his equipment and his team, as well as the environment of games and tournaments. He does not get from all these things as much FUN as he used to have before. Whether he wants it or not his attention focuses more and more on his performance in the game. Indeed, it is hard for a child who is overweight, uncoordinated, inflexible or has difficulty breathing due to poor condition to have FUN from simply being on ice, when every move, every action in a game is evaluated by parents and coaches, as well as the teammates as a success or a failure. Usually this FUN is not present under the harsh beating of the friends and opponents on ice.

The child who repeatedly fails in confrontational (or even in the co-operative) game actions will gradually lose his interest in Hockey. This sport will become boring for him.

This means that the source for FUN has transferred. Now FUN in the game depends more on whether or not the child feels progress in his performance in the game actions. In other words, in order to continue to enjoy the game the child needs to learn **SKILLS**.

Some parents may ask: what skills the child has to learn? The answer will be - both, individual skills as well as teamwork. However, individual skills must go first for two reasons.

1. These skills are best learned by the age of fourteen. If by then a child does not have these skills, it may be too late for him ever to develop a proper foundation for his Hockey Career.

2. Sound individual skills are the skills which produce a player's confidence in game action, because his performance depends on them.

Thus the motto "Fun without skills is OKAY", which unfortunately prevails in minor hockey is a wrong message to the children and their parents. This motto contradicts with the logic of a Hockey game. Following this motto inevitably leads to decline and finally loss of FUN.

In the field of teaching skills we also find people who think that **FUN** means "take it easy". Instead of consistent development of a young hockey player in order to make him fit the demands of the game these people are more prepared to adjust the skills to the child's level by oversimplifying them and reducing tremendously the quality and intensity of the training process.

In fact this road also leads the children to boredom and loss of interest in the hockey game, because inadequate skills cannot provide progress in the child's performance in the game action.

So, the parents should know that **FUN** in Hockey does not always have the same sources. At first a child has **FUN** from the general environment of a hockey game, but then it transfers to the child's performance in the game action and further to learning skills, which help him to perform.

FUN in Hockey is not about self-esteem without performance in the game action. It is not about unjustified simplification of the skills either. **FUN in Hockey is about making progress in performance in the game action and always learning some new, challenging skills which upgrade the child as a hockey player.**

WHAT DO TEAMWORK AND INDIVIDUAL SKILLS MEAN?

Hockey is a team game played by International Rules. According to the Rules the hockey players while struggling for the puck are allowed to perform various co-operative and confrontational actions. These actions form the basis of the Contest between hockey players of the two teams in their teamwork and individual skills performance.

So, what do we know from the Hockey Rules about the teamwork and individual skills? Not much: only what kind of actions the players can do on the ice and what they cannot do. However, We do not know **HOW** to do what is allowed to do. The Hockey Rules never address the question of the nature of teamwork or individual skills. What do these skills mean? **Their definitions**

are conspicuously absent in the Rules and this is misleading to the Hockey community.

At first sight of game action one gets the impression that the teamwork skills form the substance of hockey. Indeed, all the time throughout the game the players pass and receive the puck, skate without the puck in order to occupy a certain position, block a player from the other team, etc. **Only when a hockey player loses the puck as a result of weak stick-puck handling, or fails to occupy the right position on the ice because of slow skating, or is not successful in deception of his opponents, then we become aware of the existence of individual skills. The individual skills are embedded in the teamwork skills and because of that they are not so obvious sometimes for an inexperienced observer.**

Isn't this the reason for spending so much time and effort by many volunteer coaches, managers and hockey trainers on the development and description of the teamwork skills and disregarding the individual hockey skills development?

The hockey players implement their individual skills in order to perform the teamwork skills in the game. If a hockey player makes a deceptive motion which is not related to the team play it shows to us that this hockey player does not understand the tactics of his team. In the same time if a hockey player makes serious mistakes in his individual skills performance it means the player cannot fulfill the demands of his team play in the game action. **Also, we must not forget that there are game situations in which a player has to act alone and outmaneuver his opponent not merely by team strategy or tactics, but by individual skills performance and self-control that enable him to place his body-skates-stick system exactly where he wants with split-second precision.**

Lack of individual skills development does not give a player victory over a technically advanced opponent no matter how strong,

big or smart this player is. The lack of these skills also drastically reduces the level of co-operation with his teammates during teamwork. The truth is that the mastery of the teamwork depends on excellence of the individual skills performance.

The individual skills are performed by a player on ice. The ice is a slippery place, where a player is forced to use his skates, stick and protection equipment. The art of hockey skating, not walking, gliding or fighting on ice, is fundamental body-skates-stick movement where the key is – **EDGES**.

The discipline of learning and performing these edges must be developed under consistent professional supervision with self-control and respect for routine.

The edge control is achieved only through a "blind" muscular feeling of the balance since a hockey player cannot see how the edge of his skate contacts ice. Actually, the whole system of the individual skills in hockey is based mostly on the same "blind" feeling of muscle control whereas the teamwork skills are mostly controlled by visual as well as mind memory. This is the major difference that separates the two kinds of skills according to the scientific definition. This is also the principal reason why it is so difficult to learn and perform individual skills whereas it is much easier to master teamwork skills of hockey.

The process of teaching the "blind" muscular feeling of body balance, speed and coordination is known to many coaches from sports such as gymnastics, figure skating, track and field, swimming, cross country skiing, etc. Unfortunately, it is still to be discovered by hockey coaches. It is useless to try and teach the "blind" muscular feeling of body control without the proper knowledge of physiological and biological rules of muscle development.

The price of excellence in the individual skills performance depends on a player's physical, psychological and intellectual condition, which determine his readiness to devote the necessary time, attention and energy to the chosen goal. Some young players look for a short route avoiding the hard work essential to develop their body and mind, the courage to seek achievement in their individ-

ual skills. The short cut approach is the road to disappointment and abandonment of a player's dream.

Additionally, parents must know that the performance of individual skills in a game clearly indicates the degree of health and youth of the body. The demonstration of the teamwork skills during the game, on the contrary, does not tell us about the physical well-being of a player's body. Thus, the way to the young, healthy body should not be through the activity where winning at any price is the major goal.

Now that we have a better understanding of the skills that a child needs to learn in order to perform successfully in a hockey game it is time to discuss another question: Who can teach a child these skills?

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

In our society the hockey for children is organized by volunteers outside of the educational system and more resembles a social event than the real process of development of young athletes. The extent of problems that this leads to is unclear, but there is little doubt that this factor affects negatively the individual skills development of the hockey players. Without question the volunteers are totally devoted to Hockey. Otherwise, why they would have taken this extra burden? But individual skills development needs professional knowledge.

From other organized children sports we can obtain some good ideas on how to make the early years in hockey a more constructive learning experience and at the same time to keep the North American tradition of volunteer coaches intact. **In order to match the demand of higher standards in the preparation of young hockey players we need to establish the educational partnership of a Teacher, a Parent and a Coach.**

In other sports such partnership has been an accepted approach a long time ago. The goal is to produce the team players with highly developed individual skills for exciting game performance.

The educational partnership means that throughout all year-round training, the child simultaneously learns from:

Teacher - wide range of individual skills: such as Body-Skates, Body-Skates-Stick, Body-Skates-Stick-Puck skills.

Coach - diverse co-operative and confrontational teamwork skills, strategies and team system.

Student - the desire to learn the individual skills and implement them in teamplay; the strong wish to cooperate with his teammates and confront his team opponents in the game.

The interacting roles of these three people are major factors for bringing a child to the point of peak performance. It is also the interaction of these adults in their roles, their respective personalities and characters that produces the standards of Excellence which dominate the hockey world and amateur sports in general.

TEACHER

The art of teaching individual hockey skills should be viewed in our society as an honourable profession and young players as well as their parents need to feel more closely linked to their teacher. Too often we underestimate the importance of consistent work on individual skills when a child is young enough. Meanwhile learning and repeating individual skills must become for a young player a routine, like brushing teeth in the morning and having breakfast.

How can a child successfully play defense if he does not know how to skate backwards properly? Without the individual skills of backwards skating he cannot perform tactical confrontational moves against opposition players. For the coach it will be a waste of time to teach this player teamwork skills. The ideal development of a hockey player occurs when individual skills are mastered before skills involving teamplay tactics are learned.

The individual skills education has to come from a professional Teacher because coaching the tactics and the teamwork skills is not the same thing as teaching fundamental or individual skills. If we compare, for example, organized hockey with organized music, then we will see that a coach is

like a conductor of an orchestra. He does not teach orchestra players how to read music from notes. Musicians learn music skills from a music teacher before playing in an orchestra under the direction of a conductor.

From a Teacher a child first learns individual skills, their quality, diversity and congruity. Only then does he start to learn how to implement them within teamwork skills. From a Teacher a child learns the value of hard work, the disciplined approach and the pride that comes from succeeding at a difficult task. The price of that task includes the integrity to "be your own self", to "do your own thing" and the courage to lose, as well as the determination to win. This attitude shows up later in his team practices, at home and school.

The professional Teacher leads young skaters towards constant challenge. He prefers to ask about the student's accomplishments than to flatter him by praising his potential.

COACH

In a team a child meets a Coach and his teammates who have different hockey background, level of individual skills and experience. From a Coach a child learns teamwork skills, he masters the art of giving a puck to his teammates in order to support a teamplay action and taking the puck from the opponent in one-on-one game action.

By encouraging creativity, improvisation and unpredictability in the teamplay a Coach stimulates the young players to perform their individual skills under game conditions at their best level.

A Coach teaches hockey players sportsmanship and with him they learn to bear the pressure of game competition. At the same time a Coach must discipline himself to realize that during a game it is the young players who own the ice. He only can stand behind their failure and inspire them for future success. He must not leave the tournament and close the door with a final word to a young hockey player **"you blew it"**. Winning a game is great, but a

defeat must be regarded primarily as a challenge to improve performance.

The parents must never forget that a Coach in their child's team is a volunteer. Usually he works with the team a relatively short period of time (8-12 months), when he focuses his attention on formulating effectively teamplay philosophy, prioritizing games strategies and planning practices with varying levels of the teamwork skills. As to individual skills development, a longer period of time, consistency and the most important – clear understanding of the laws of a child's body and mind – are needed. Therefore, parents cannot and must not expect from an amateur Coach, who has not received the appropriate training, extensive work on the individual skills development of the young hockey players.

HOCKEY PARENT

Hockey is a family sport and a family makes the decision of what they want for their child: to be in hockey simply to play or to be in hockey as a sport in order to perform and gain confidence on ice as well as public recognition.

A high percentage of parents attend most of their child's games and practices. But **if** the decision has been made in favor of hockey as a sport, then a Parent must organize his time and stay more active in the continuous build-up of his child in hockey. **A Parent must understand the criteria of progress as well as the requirements in this sport and starting from there organize and control the development of his child as a young hockey player. Neither a Teacher, nor a Coach can replace a Parent in fulfilling this task.**

Organizing and controlling the child's hockey development means a number of things. The first among them to be mentioned – **organizing a Hockey Player's Homework.**

Hockey Player's Homework becomes very important when there is lack of ice-time and this is exactly what happens in reality. **Every young player in North America knows that he has to play at least 60 games or he would not make it. But a Parent must understand that all together these games constitute**

about 10 hours of ice-time for each child. Is it enough for the build-up of a young body? Especially if we keep in mind that this is actually game time when a child is expected to perform, but not to learn. As to the team practices they are oriented primarily to the development of teamwork skills. The amount of ice-time for practices also is not sufficient. Compare, for example, the average practice to game ratio for a twelve year old player in Europe and in Canada. In Europe it is 6 practices to one game whereas for a Canadian young player the average ratio is one practice to two games.

Such simple analysis of ice-time available for a child leaves no doubt that there is a strong demand in the Hockey Player's Homework. The main goal of the Homework must be the development of the child's physical fitness and, in particular, of five basic motor abilities which constitute the fitness: **power, flexibility, quickness, endurance and agility.**

To achieve this goal a Parent will require a whole set of different exercises. Among them are the drills, specific for the hockey, which form the arsenal of a player's Individual Skills, as well as auxiliary exercises, well known in other sports or designed particularly for increasing certain athletic ability.

This role also contains the task of **choosing a Teacher for the child**. Indeed, with the increasing number of hockey schools and amount of hockey instructors the parents have to decide what they are looking for, what is appropriate for their child. Here are some leads, which I hope will help a Parent to make the right choice.

1. Find out what skills – individual hockey skills or teamwork skills – your child will be learning in the hockey school. It is important to know that many schools teach the children teamplay and by doing that they in fact duplicate the job of a coach. On the other hand, there is little sense, if any for a child to spend time and effort on learning teamwork skills with the boys from the hockey school, who are not his teammates and probably would never play on the same team with him. Before actually spending money a Parent must be fully aware of the hockey school program and the skills that his child is going to learn there.

2. Determine what knowledge and experience in sports does the Teacher have. Some hockey schools bring in big name players in order to attract the public. However, being a professional hockey player does not necessarily mean being a professional Teacher of Hockey.

It is important for a Teacher to have personal experience of competing at high levels of sport. However, it is also essential for him to be educated in Physiology, Biology, Psychology, Biomechanics and other sports related disciplines. He must have knowledge and experience of other sports, beside hockey as well. A Parent must realize that such professional knowledge would provide a solid scientific base for a Teacher to teach the child individual hockey skills. With proper teaching the child will be able to skate faster, be more powerful, agile and better balanced.

While choosing a hockey school for his child a Parent must remember that in teaching individual skills a Teacher is Authority # 1 in the educational triangle and therefore he has to be a real professional.

3. Evaluate if a Teacher's values are important to you as well. A Parent must understand that most hockey schools function as free enterprises and very often the logic of the learning process contradicts with the demand for making profit. **It depends on the Teacher's**

values and personality what compromises he would choose in order to combine teaching and business goals.

There are other aspects that might be considered by a Parent in the process of choosing a hockey school for his child, e.g. the location of the school, the time schedule and certainly the fees. But I would not advise a Parent to make his decision based exclusively on these aspects. **Never save on the education of your child! Re-evaluate your priorities and try to provide the best opportunities for learning and development for your child.**

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE LEARNING PROCESS

The starting point for the learning process **is motivation**, that is, when a child shows interest in learning something.

Usually, a child easily gets interested in a hockey game, because there are many reasons for such interest:

- attractive uniform and equipment;
- novelty of the game, its unpredictability;
- brothers, sisters or friends, who play hockey;
- the parents, who are hockey fans;
- physical exercise;
- competition, etc.

A psychologist would say that hockey is a polymotivated game activity. Some children may want to play hockey just for fun and exercise with little concern for perfection. Others may start with limited goals and later find their horizons rising as they become better acquainted with hockey and their own potential.

The logic of the game gradually focuses the child's attention on his performance and brings him to the desire of learning more in order to be a better hockey player. **But this transition does not always happen automatically.**

Sometimes the interest in learning skills comes too late. Instead a child may become extremely interested, for example, in hockey equipment and asks his parents to buy him different types of it. In another case, a child may not want to learn the hockey skills because his friends show no interest in learning. Or a child may suffer from his failures in the games, but has not related yet his poor performance with the lack of individual hockey skills and necessity for learning.

Although all parents know how difficult it is sometimes to influence their child's interests, they must not give up. In order to encourage the child towards learning hockey skills explain to him the requirements of the game and the relation between his performance on ice and the hockey skills development. Be consistent in taking the child to the lessons with a teacher and team practices, as well as helping him with the Hockey Player's Homework. By doing this you assist the child in developing the same serious attitude towards learning hockey skills as you have. Be sensitive to all changes in the child's interests and help him understand himself – **the reasons and the consequences of his behavior**. Assist the child in evaluating his achievements and formulating further goals for his participation in hockey.

Goal formation is the second important moment in the learning process. Although it has been already decided by the family "to participate in hockey as a sport", the practical meaning of this goal may remain vague to the child.

In order to help the child the parent himself must clearly understand the succession of objectives that lead to the build-up of a young hockey player.

All Hockey can be divided into three periods: 1) Kids' Hockey with the age interval of children from 7 years (sometimes 5 – 6 years) to 14 years; 2) Teenagers' Hockey – from 15 years to 16 – 17 years and 3) Adult Hockey – from 18 years and further on. The differences between these periods consist not only in the age of the hockey players, but primarily in the level of development of their body and mind. These very differences determine the objectives for each of the three periods in Hockey.

Thus, in the first period – Kids' Hockey,-the main objective is **LEARNING**. The child should master fundamental and individual hockey skills, as well as teamwork skills.

In this age interval, when the growing child's body is flexible and responsive to exercises, the Parent must not miss the unique opportunity for all-round build-up of the young hockey player. This is the only time when abilities are developed!

Therefore, the focus also should be on the development of general athletic fitness and its five main qualities: power, flexibility, quickness, endurance and agility. There is no need in speeding up early specialization (e.g. in defense, or offense), because one might make the mistake in predicting the development of the body and by this destroy the child's hockey future. That is why the Parent *must* not worry too much when the coach in the best interests of the team changes the child's position. In fact, the child benefits from the opportunity to learn more about each position.

In Teenagers' Hockey the situation is changed. The player has become more mature, he has already entered into the age of puberty and his muscles have started to grow. At this time the contours of his "future" adult body are more clear. Also, the young hockey player has acquired a solid basis in individual and teamwork skills and is in good shape as an athlete.

Under such conditions the objective should be changed to **PERFORMING** in game action. **In this period the player's as well as his Parent's attention is focused on finding and developing his own, unique, individual style.**

In this style the player finds the possible combination of the advantages of his "natural gifts" (e.g. body size, muscles constitution, temperament, etc.) with the acquired level of skills in order to achieve the best results in the action.

At this point I would like to quote my former teacher: **"Individual style is similar to a custom-made suit which is useful only to the person for whom it was sewn". Teenagers' Hockey is the time for specialization.**

In Adult Hockey the objective is certainly **PERFORMING** creative individual style. By this time a hockey player should be mature enough to analyze his efficiency in the game action and constantly work on its improvement. In this age interval a parent suddenly realizes that his child has grown up and is able to move on his own.

While working with the child on formulating goals the Parent must always keep in mind that this is not a kind of automatic process. The child needs time to fully understand and accept the goal. Therefore it would be a big mistake on the Parent's part to

build his relations with a child according to the pattern "my task you carry it out". The Parent's authority is his last resort and the less often it is used the more efficient it is. There should be a habit of reasoning together – a Parent with the child. And in the process of such co-operative thinking about the child's hockey the next goal will emerge.

It is helpful sometimes to arrange so called "problematic situations". To do this the Parent at first helps the child to see the problem he is facing at the moment with his hockey game performance and when the Parent is convinced that the child understands the problem not to answer it at once, but rather give the child an opportunity to find the answer on his own.

It is natural that the child's interest in learning hockey skills decreases now and then. Many different things could cause this and the Parent should try his best in order to find out the real reason. In the meantime the Parent can use a kind of "short-term" push to encourage the child to continue the learning process. As an example I want to bring up here a story which I heard recently from one of the parents. A child didn't feel like going to the lesson on individual hockey skills and he asked the parent for the permission not to go if he scores 1 goal in the last game. The Parent gave such permission, but under condition that the child scores 2 goals in the game. The next day the child didn't score at all and following the "agreement" with the parent he went to the lesson on individual skills. He liked the lesson and there were no more problems in coming to the school.

There are many different ways for the "short-term" encouragement and the Parent may be very creative in using it. However, he must always remember that this is only a supplementary tool and the work on formulating goals still has to be done.

Having discussed the questions of developing and maintaining the child's interest in learning it is time to describe briefly the actual process **of mastering the individual hockey skills.**

I've seen a lot of parents who brought in their children with the desire to teach them proper individual skills. After attending 6-12 lessons, they quit, disappointed by the fact that the child hadn't learned

many skills or he learned some but had not implemented them in the game. "I'm spending my money and my time, and I want to see results" – they used to say. Then after a while many of these parents came back to school.

These parents felt it difficult to accept that the learning process of the individual skills has its own uncompromising laws and no one can successfully break or avoid them. The only thing that is left to the Parent – "Be patient and consistent".

So, what are these laws? What happens with a child when he learns the individual hockey skills?

The most significant one is **the SEQUENCE of STEPS in learning.**

Step # 1. Adjustment to the learning environment.

When the child comes for the first time to a lesson on individual hockey skills he finds himself in an atmosphere very different from team practices. The child needs time to get used to the teacher, to the method of teaching, to the new faces of boys and girls, as well as their parents who came to the class, etc. At this period the child gets easily distracted by any noise, becomes very upset when he cannot cope with the drill. It seems to him that he is the only one on ice who doesn't know anything.

Adjustment to the learning environment may take up to 6 lessons. It depends on the child, his ability to orient himself in the new situation. The Parent's role at this period is: to be patient and supportive to his child, to encourage him to continue the learning.

Step # 2. Orientation in the individual skills.

When a child has adjusted to the learning environment he can focus his attention **on mastering the individual skills.** Each time after a particular skill has been demonstrated to him the child has a clear visual picture of the movement. **But this is an external picture.** When the child begins to repeat the skill he realizes that **his inner picture – the picture of muscle feelings – is confused.**

The child needs some time to familiarize himself with the new skill: to try to do it a few times and become aware of differences in his muscle feelings. The duration of such orientation in the move-

ment varies depending on the child and the type of the movement. However, after having learned a sufficient number of different skills, the child notices improvement in his coordination, and the period of orientation in the new individual skills decreases.

The Parent must be patient and not push the child towards faster learning of the movement, because it may lead to negative results. It would be more helpful to provide the feedback in which the parent not only names the child's mistakes, but as well draws his attention to the key moments that may cause such mistakes.

Gradually, after a series of trials to repeat the new skill the child succeeds, but his movements are uncertain and his attention is totally absorbed by it. The child still needs more practice in the skill in order to gain stability in controlling his muscle feelings. It means that in learning this skill the Step # 2 is over and the child enters into the next one.

Step # 3. Automatization of the individual skills.

The child reaches the point when his performance of the skill becomes quite accurate, but as soon as demands towards the performance change a little bit (for example, the child is asked to show the skill to the whole group of students), the child fails. **The child acquired the skill, but it has not become automatic yet.** He needs to practice it more and under various conditions, so that the skill becomes really all-round and can be used further in game situations.

Usually, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide during his lessons numerous drills, where the particular skill is one of the many components. This is the most effective way of accelerating the process of automatization of a new skill.

As to the Parent, again he needs patience and consistency. The Parent must always keep in mind and if needed explain this to the child, that at this phase changes in the quality of the skill are not so obvious. They occur gradually and in minor portions. But one day all of a sudden the skill becomes smooth and stable and easy to perform. This marks the end of step # 3 in the learning of a particular skill.

Another important law of learning individual skills is **CONTINUITY** of the process, which means that the efforts in mastering

the skills should be persistent and take place in unbroken succession. It implies that one cannot simply "buy ice-time": take a few lessons, learn something and leave. Such approach would never bring impressive results. In fact, it leads to waste of money and time, because the Parent and the child must be prepared to start the learning process from the beginning when they decide to return to the school.

The Parent must know and accept that the process of learning and the art of implementing the individual skills in the game contest are totally different things. The major difference lies in the teaching methods. For teaching the individual hockey skills the most effective is the method of imitation, whereas the art of implementing these skills in highly unpredictable game action can be mastered only with the method of trial and error. The latter demands much more time for the orientation phase and this phase is different from the orientation during learning through imitation. That is why the Parent must be prepared to wait until implementation of individual skills will occur in the game. The period of waiting may be long enough. It depends on many factors. One of the key factors are the individual distinctions of the child.

The last but not the least moment of the learning process, which I would like to discuss here is **the feedback**. It is hard to overestimate the role of the Parent's feedback for the development of the young hockey player. One may say that the feedback on the child's progress in mastering fundamental, individual and teamwork skills constitutes the substance of the parent-child communication.

In fact, the child is looking impatiently for the Parent's evaluation of his activities in hockey. The child depends very much on it. For example, the Parent's feedback can totally change (increase or decrease) the child's interest in learning hockey skills. It can even affect the child's self-esteem: he may feel better about himself and more confident after the Parent's feedback, or on the contrary, lose all self-confidence. By means of his feedback the Parent can correct in some aspects even the Teacher's and the Coach's evaluation. **In other words, feedback is a very powerful tool and parents must be skillful in using it.**

There are a few aspects in giving feedback that the Parent should know in order not to make big mistakes.

The first question is: **WHAT should be evaluated?**

For a child of 6 – 9 years old (sometimes even older) It is not enough to receive the feedback only on the results of his performance. It is difficult for him to agree with the statement such as: "You were not good enough because during the lesson you didn't do this skill properly". The child might have the opposite feeling: "I did very well during the lesson, because I was trying hard". The difference between the Parent's evaluation and the child's assessment in this example is that **the first talks about results of participation in the lesson and the latter thinks about the process.**

So, when giving the feedback the Parent must take into consideration this special feature of childhood and evaluate not only the results of the child's performance during the lesson, but also the process – did he work hard or not. Especially this is necessary to do with small children.

The second question is: **HOW to give feedback so that it helps the child to learn further?**

In order to motivate the child and help him to progress in learning the feedback must satisfy several requirements:

- the Parent must try to use objective measures in his evaluation of the child's performance and the child must understand why the Parent is satisfied (or not satisfied) with him;
- first he compares the child's results with those who are "equal" with him (age, experience in learning skills, etc.) and only then with those, who are stronger;
- the child stays active in the feedback by giving a self-evaluation of his own performance.

The child benefits even more from being provided with appropriate feedback. Besides the increase of interest in mastering the individual skills, he learns how to evaluate correctly his own performance on ice. This ability to self-evaluation will be very useful on further stages of his hockey career – Teenagers' and Adult Hockey.

The Parent also benefits from the regular feedback: by analyzing the child's performance and explaining his mistakes the Parent

learns more about hockey. In fact, the Parent gets a unique opportunity to grow together with his child.

